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PP RUEHCN RUEHGH  
DE RUEHIN #3730/01 3060620  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 020620Z NOV 06  
FM AIT TAIPEI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2865  
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5869  
RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 0501  
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1493  
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG 5461  
RUEHGZ/AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU 9680  
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 7089

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 003730

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Weak KMT Campaign Allows DPP to Catch Up in Kaohsiung  
Mayoral Race

REF: A) TAIPEI 3444 B) 2005 TAIPEI 3856

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11. (SBU) Summary: Negative reactions to Shih Ming-te's movement against President Chen and KMT campaign shortcomings in leadership and strategy are jeopardizing KMT candidate Huang Chun-ying's bid to win the December 9 Kaohsiung mayoral election. Recent media polling indicates that the Kaohsiung mayoral contest is now a neck-to-neck race between Huang and DPP candidate Chen Chu. Many political observers believe that the Kaohsiung mayoral election will have an important effect on the future prospects of the DPP and KMT. Therefore, top leaders of both parties are focusing on trying to win this election in hopes victory will help their party also win the presidency in 2008. End Summary.

12. (U) Despite earlier speculation that DPP corruption scandals would hand an easy victory to the KMT in Kaohsiung, recent media and DPP polling indicate that the mayoral election has become a neck-to-neck race. An October 19 China Times poll showed that DPP Kaohsiung mayoral candidate Chen Chu's popularity has increased from 24 percent to 31 percent since June whereas KMT candidate Huang Chun-ying's popularity has increased just two points, from 35 percent to 37 percent, during the same period. The poll showed a steady increase in Chen Chu's approval rating among DPP supporters and swing voters, and also indicated that the two candidates have an equal chance of winning the election on December 9. A third candidate, the TSU's Lo Chih-ming, was supported by only 1 percent of polled respondents.

13. (U) According to the media, several political observers attributed the decrease in KMT candidate Huang Chun-ying's popularity to negative reaction to the southern tour of Shih Ming-te's Anti-President Chen movement. Shortly before the anti-Chen tour, Huang Chun-ying scored an impressive 42 percent popularity rating in the polls, which afterwards dropped to 37 percent. Many swing voters appear to have become more conservative in expressing their political positions after the altercations between the Anti-Bian supporters and the supporters of President Chen that occurred in Kaohsiung on September 29 (ref A, para 2).

14. (SBU) Chan Yuan-hsiang, a senior local journalist, disputed the view that Shih Ming-te's southern tour was the main factor in Huang Chun-ying's declining popularity. Chan told AIT/K that Huang had made major mistakes in choosing an incapable campaign team and targeting the wrong issues. Huang's major campaign aides, including KMT Vice Chairman Chiang Ping-kun and Secretary-general Chen Shueh-sheng, are not Kaohsiung natives and lack close connections

with local KMT factions. According to Chan, KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou finally noticed the campaign leadership problem and asked former Kaohsiung mayor Wu Dun-yi to step in and campaign for Huang. Although Wu left Kaohsiung eight years ago, he has maintained his connections with local KMT factions and opinion leaders, Chan noted.

15. (SBU) Chan asserted that the KMT plans to cooperate with independent city council candidates with known organized crime backgrounds to buy votes for the KMT mayoral candidate. Chan claimed that the KMT is offering these candidates the city council speaker seat in exchange of their support for Huang Chun-ying. Local crime syndicates could guarantee a better turnout with vote-buying, Chan suggested, adding that tying the city council race to the mayoral election was a clever campaign tactic. On the other hand, KMT Kaohsiung Chairman Hsu Fu-ming indicated KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou would never allow vote-buying during these elections and that, instead, it is the DPP that has already begun to line up with cash in an effort to mobilize reluctant swing voters to get to the polls for the DPP.

16. (SBU) According to Chan, in a neck-to-neck race such as the Kaohsiung mayoral contest, candidates should avoid using a negative campaign strategy because smear tactics might backfire. Chan gave the example of the mayoral election between DPP candidate Frank Hsieh and Wu Dun-yi eight years ago, in which Wu lost his reelection bid to Hsieh by some 4,000 votes after using negative campaigning that focused on the kidnapping/murder case of a TV celebrity's daughter. Chan admitted that the Kaohsiung Metro (KRTC) scandal (ref B), which involved the importation of foreign laborers, might have some impact on DPP mayoral candidate Chen Chu, who was formerly Chair of the Council of Labor Affairs, but he doubted it would be a decisive factor in the election's outcome. He dismissed speculation

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that former acting Kaohsiung mayor Chen Chi-mai, currently serving as secretary-general of Chen Chu's campaign office, would not campaign wholeheartedly for Chen Chu because the KRTC scandal had cost his mayoral aspirations and led to his father's conviction on corruption charges. With a reputation for effectiveness in disciplinary action, the DPP will convince all local factions to campaign for Chen Chu to defend its rule in Kaohsiung, Chan predicted.

17. (SBU) Most local media observers believe that the Kaohsiung mayoral election is no longer just a local election, but a duel between the two major political parties, with important implications for the future of the KMT and the DPP and the outcome of the 2008 presidential election. Some commentators argue that if the Pan-Green loses the election in Kaohsiung, the leadership of President Chen and DPP Chairman Yu will collapse and the DPP decision-making body will have to be reorganized. If the Pan-Blue loses, KMT Chairman Ma's leadership will be challenged, which could affect his bid to become president in 2008. The Kaohsiung election results may also affect Shih Ming-te's movement to unseat President Chen. A victory by the DPP's Chen Chu will be widely interpreted as a major setback for Shih's movement. The DPP is characterizing the Kaohsiung mayoral election as a major battle to defend its rule, and, perhaps to stimulate a sense of crisis and voter enthusiasm, Chen Chu has even predicted that the DPP will lose both the 2007 legislative and 2008 presidential elections if it loses Kaohsiung on December 9.

THIELE

WANG